

[IX century]

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THE IMPACT OF RUSSIAN CULTURE ON SOVIET COMMUNISM

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subjected agricultural population. In the ruling class of conquerors—who were marrying the native women—the steppe traditions of an unlimited paternal power, centered in a God-like, distant and strict father, tended to prevail. The principles of seniority, of priority of the male sex and of super-ordination and subordination among brothers and sisters favored sibling rivalry in this family system. At the same time, the mother, following her native traditions, tended to assert her marital equality, to maintain separate property rights, to teach her children the native speech and customs, and to protect them against the caprice and wrath of a domineering and warlike father.

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It is likely that children in such families of clashing marital and social philosophies might be exposed to alternating experiences of rejection and over-protection; they might develop an exaggerated self-concern and power-orientation, as well as feelings of inadequacy and dependence. Extremes in emotional reactions ranging from blind submission to destructive aggression and violent revolt tend to develop in such circumstances.

Such traits which contain a core of emotional instability and perpetual strife did not seem to be favorable for the growth and consolidation of State. Instead, a number of small principalities were formed, whose ruling strata were torn by internal rivalries and splits, and by never-ending parricidal and fratricidal feuds. Moreover, these petty princes and war chieftains, following steppe tradition, were interested in waging warfare more than in promoting agriculture or industry—which was contrary to the view of life and the social philosophy of the subjected population. There was, therefore, a lack of common culture, lack of common interests and want of social solidarity between the subjects and their warlike lords. Such a situation fomented social unrest; local riots and mass uprisings, which in turn promoted increasing rigidity of controls, centralization of power, never-ending internal splits and never-ending warfare.

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By the ninth century A.D., these turbulent warriors came into conflict with the Byzantine Empire which had a political interest in the same area. This contact with Byzantium was of far-reaching consequence, because it introduced the Eastern Church into the social and political structure of Russian society. This institu-

INTRODUCTION

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tion has provided moral and ideological foundations for the formation and the expansion of a globally oriented empire, while at the same time, it has also reinforced some of the elements in the structure of the Russian State which have been responsible for its explosiveness and instability.

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In the Byzantine politico-religious system, the Church was not only a religious institution but also a political organization, and an arm of the political power. Byzantium therefore undertook to Christianize the Russian lands as a means of political penetration. Following Byzantine Church traditions and practices, the dominant native speech was adopted for Church services. Christianization therefore fostered also Slavization of these regions. Moreover, the Church of Byzantium carried with it the Byzantine concept of unity of Church and State, as well as that of a god-like monarchical power, with the mission to create a Universal Christian Empire.

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The Eastern Church also sanctioned unlimited paternal authority and promoted protection-dependency relationships both on politico-administrative and on family levels. This Church sponsored unconditional obedience, attitudes of reverence and gratitude, and feelings of humility and self-effacement, fear and awe in the relations of man to his God, his Prince and his Father. According to the precepts of this Church-State philosophy, the authorities were held responsible for the well-being as well as for the failures and sins of their dependents. Thus the Byzantine Church was preparing psychological and ideological grounds for a politico-religious integration of Russian lands in a system of military theocracy, which became characterized by its Messianic ideology of world redemption and by its dominance-submission and protection-dependency relationships. But such a political system was in sharp conflict with the anarchic view of life and the equalitarian philosophy of family and community relations held by large sections of the population in that area.

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This basic internal clash of ideologies in Russian society was intensified in the course of the following centuries when the pressure of the steppe nomads and of the expanding Western empires favored increased militarization, economic regimentation and centralization of total power in the hands of an auto-

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642 cratic Czar. By the time of Ivan the Terrible, the power of the independent landed aristocracy was suppressed, and the autocratic power rested now on a service nobility who were given lands in conditional possession depending upon their service and their loyalty to the Czar. These people therefore found themselves in a slave-like dependency upon the ruler who was likened to God, a situation that promoted political and social regimentation and fostered domineering-subservience relationships, thus intensifying the existing incompatibilities between the upper and lower strata of the Czardom.

[157] Domineering-subservience relationships are likely to breed humiliating experiences of self-abasement and feelings of wounded self-esteem which in turn might foster intense hostilities as well as compensatory ideas of grandeur. Thus in new circumstances, both self-seeking and power-orientation were reinforced in the upper strata, and manifested themselves in the oppressive rule of the nobility, in their extreme factionalism, and in their ruthless struggle for personal power and for the favors of the Czar.

[566] This trend of events, by the second part of the sixteenth century, led to establishment of serfdom and to direct interference of the service nobility and of the government in the communal and family relations of the peasantry. From this time on, the Church, the State and the landlords joined hands in strengthening the power of the Father and of the village elders and sponsoring in the peasant family and in the village community, dominance-submission relationships, absolute power and dependence, blind obedience and self-abnegation.

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[579] The inevitable clash of this new power-oriented social philosophy with the old stateless and equalitarian values, was reflected in intense family and community tensions and in mass restlessness. Thus a weakening of power and of controls on any level—family, local, or national—opened the way to urges of destructive aggression and revolt against all the holders of power: the fathers, the village elders, the landlords, the Church and the Czar. Outbreaks of such extreme enmity were manifested in frequent communal riots, in mass vagrancy, in bloody revolutionary uprisings, and in widespread dissent from the official

174 to maintain a system of economic self-sufficiency which was restricted to small villages or groups of such villages.¹

- 175 In early documents these Old-Slavonic plowmen are described
- 181 as peaceful, moderate, mild, and humane, patient and sober, disinterested in power, hard working, living in social and political democracy. They are pictured as being opposed to subjection, but unable to offer much resistance to a foreign aggressor since they were not skilled in warfare. Procopius (6th century), for instance, said that "these people are not ruled by one man, but they have lived from of old under a democracy, and consequently everything which involves their welfare, whether for good or for ill, is referred to the people."² And Emperor Leo (9th century) stated the following:

... jealous of their liberty they have always refused to submit themselves to the Empire. ... even those who have accepted Christianity keep as much as they can the forms of their ancient freedom. ... This is a numerous nation, patient in difficult times, and very industrious. Heat, cold, hunger, and want of all things do not beat down these people. ... They used to be very hospitable and still maintain with great care this virtue. They are affable people and receive travellers with much kindness, show them the way, and protect them against insult. If a traveller would not be well treated by his host because of host's fault all the people would attack the host. They behave with much gentleness also toward their slaves; they do not condemn them to perpetual slavery, but fix a time of service ... after which time ... they free them. The women are well-behaved, and attached to their husbands. ... These people are very frugal ... they prefer to live with much freedom. ... They like to take refuge in the woods or in inaccessible places.³

- 175 The people of Polesie seem to have been politically organized
- 621 in a system of smaller groupings of self-governing villages or even in single autonomous villages connected among themselves, not in the form of a central authority or state, but rather as a
- [565] loose confederation of independent units. Apparently, there were no marked social distinctions or differences in class and rank in this society. There was no aristocracy, no separate class of priests or warriors, no cities, no temples. There was, therefore, no class or clique which sought power and expansion over others,

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POWER-INDIFFERENCE OF THE OLD-SLAVONIC PLOWMEN

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and hence, no group support could be found if a leader had attempted to form a centralized political authority or an imperial system over the whole area. The old Russian Chronicle of Kiev (12th century) describing a tribe with such a culture (the Polians) states that among them each kindred group (*rod*) lived in its own separate locality and had its own government.⁴

In a like manner, principles of dignity and moderation, as well as personal autonomy and lack of coerciveness, prevailed in family relations of these people. The Chronicle, for instance, states:

The Polians had customs of their fathers, customs mild and peaceful (*krotok i tikh*); they showed a kind of reserve (*stydenie*) towards their daughters-in-law (*snokha*) and their sisters, towards their mothers and their parents, towards their fathers-in-law and their brothers-in-law; to all of the persons named they showed great reserve. They had marriage customs: the bridegroom did not go to seek his bride; she was taken to him in the evening, and the following morning they brought what belonged to her (*chto vdaduche*).⁵

It appears that the family organization of the Polians rested on mutual respect of all family members; that the bride brought the dowry which remained her personal property; that she might have had the initiative in wooing. This contention is supported by other evidence. Cosmas Pragensis, for instance, speaking of the old Bohemian Slavs, states: "It is not the men who choose the maids, but the maids themselves who take the husbands they like, and when they like." A French writer who visited Ukraine in the seventeenth century wrote: "In Ukraine, contrary to the customs of all other nations, the husbands do not choose their wives, but are themselves chosen by their future consorts."⁶

There is also other evidence concerning some matriarchal traits of the early Slavs.⁷ Throughout ages, women of the plains between the Dnieper and the Volga maintained property rights over their dowries and also over income from vegetables, poultry, dairy products and yarn that they produced and sold, though such rights were not recognized to men.⁸ Although a woman in Russia did not have any claim to the property of her father or her brother, and only a limited right to that of her husband, she had the privilege, denied to a man, of saving and building up a

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THE BYZANTINE CHURCH AND MUSCOVITE THEOCRACY

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territories. He was adorned with the title of the "Metropolitan of Kiev and of all Russias,"* a symbolic beginning of Russian religious and political unity.

When the Tartars in the beginning of the thirteenth century imposed their overlordship over all Russian lands, lacking an efficient administration and interested not so much in governing as in tributes, they restored to the native princes their old titles and gave them the right to collect tributes for them. In this manner in the beginning of the fourteenth century Ivan Kalita of Moscow succeeded in obtaining a *yarlyk* (charter of privileges) in which the Tartar Kahn recognized Ivan as the *Veliky Knyaz* (Grand Prince). A few years later Ivan also became the chief collector of tributes for the Kahn in Russian lands.

In his function as chief farmer of internal revenues Ivan practiced extortion from his Russian subjects and acquired a great personal wealth. His riches enabled him to purchase entire domains and apanages, and to buy the protection and backing of the Kahn. Seeing the ascendancy of Ivan, and following Byzantine traditions of Church and state unity, the Metropolitan of Kiev and of all Russias moved his residence to Moscow and built a cathedral there, ready to support Moscow princes in their political ambitions.

The expansion of Moscow's power over other Russian lands was favored also by external circumstances and pressures. By the second part of the fourteenth century the central authority of the Tartar Empire, the Golden Horde, had weakened and as was customary in Turco-Mongol society, civil wars ensued among the contenders for the throne. This situation presented an opportunity for power wise princes of Moscow to change their policy of cringing and prostration before the Tartars into that of rebellion and bargain. From now on at times they fought the Tartars, at other times they were again kneeling before them; but they now knew how to take advantage of Tartar weaknesses and how to gain new possessions with Tartar assistance. In this policy of expansion at the expense of other Russian principalities the Muscovites had the support not only of the Khans but that of the Eastern Orthodox clergy as well. Their

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- 175 allies were also the local boyars who were traditionally always ready, at the critical moment, to abandon their own local princes and rush to join the ascending power.

[795] In the middle of the fifteenth century, the representatives of the Church of Byzantium, in the hope of obtaining the Pope's help against the Turks, agreed to a union with Rome. However, in Moscow, whose power was ascending in the face of the disintegrating Mongol Empire and where the Turks were not considered a threat, no need was felt for any Latin help. Thus the Metropolitan of Moscow who gave his approval for the union with Rome was deposed and the Russian Church was declared autocephalous and independent of the Greek Patriarch. This break with the Byzantine Church was of far-reaching consequences. It placed the Russian Church into a completely dependent position on the Grand Prince of Moscow. From now on, the objectives of the Russian state and those of the Russian Church became inseparable.

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795 Another international event, the fall of Constantinople (1453), removed the last ideological barrier to the growth of the Muscovite Principality into a world empire. Since the seat of the Greek Patriarch had fallen into the hands of the infidels, Moscow became the strongest and the leading Eastern-Orthodox state thus inheriting the Messianic ideology of world salvation and of a Universal Orthodox Empire.

In accordance with such traditions the Russian clergy began to consider Moscow as the only true successor of the first and of the second Rome, as the only depositor of the True Faith, and as the center of a Messianic politico-religious Orthodoxy. By the beginning of the sixteenth century this ideology of the "Third Rome" was fully developed. The Grand Prince of Moscow had already adopted the title of Czar (Caesar). At that time a monk of one of the old monasteries of Pskov stated this idea in a letter to Czar Vasili III, in the following manner:

[186] Two Romes have now fallen, and the third one, our Moscow, yet standeth, and a fourth shall there never be. In thy puissant Empire the council of our church doth shine throughout all the world with the light of holiness which is greater even than the light of the sun. In all the world thou alone art the Christian Tzar.⁵

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PEASANT UPRISINGS

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EVER since the establishment of serfdom, slaves and serfs would free themselves from oppressive bondage by joining the gangs of vagabonds, fugitives from justice, army deserters, malcontents and escapees of all kinds, many of whom lived by theft, robbery, and begging. These victims of oppression, as well as many adventurers, gathered along the frontiers of the empire in "no man's land" where they would organize themselves as bands of freebooters, guerillas, and mercenaries, ready to enter the service of rival powers.

In the regions of the lower Don and Dnieper these communities of fugitives of all social classes and occupations and of many races formed elective military governments, known as the Cossack republics. Once they were established, these free Cossack communes served as a place of attraction to all who longed for freedom from oppression or who sought adventure. In these free societies no one was asked any question about his passport, his identity, his domicile, his faith, or his belongings. Everyone willing to fight and loot was welcome, but none was forced to come or stay.¹

However, by the middle of the seventeenth century in these Cossack commonwealths, there appeared a social differentiation between the old settlers and the newcomers. The older settlers formed a property-owning class known as the "house-owners," and the newcomers became known as the *golytba* (the naked). And it was these unsettled and restless Cossacks of the "naked class" that played an especially prominent part in the uprisings of the seventeenth century and later.²

The first part of the seventeenth century, known in the history of the Czardom as the "Period of Trouble," was characterized by the lack of an established authority. The old dynasty had

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[566] ended in a violent and mysterious way and a number of pre-
tenders arose to take its place. It was in this interval between the
fall of the former authority and the relative consolidation of a
new one that the oppressed strata of the Czardom saw an oppor-
tunity to rebel against a state of humiliating bondage and
economic misery. Seeking relief from their burdens and yearning
for social acceptance in a system of equalitarian relationships,
the poorer burghers, homeless Cossacks and runaway peasants
and slaves flocked into the camp of Bolotnikov, himself an ex-
slave and adventurer who marched at the head of this strange
army upon Moscow. From his camp near Moscow he distributed
proclamations inviting slaves and serfs to slay their masters,
commanding all of his followers to rise against the vovodas and
others in authority, and exciting them to rob and beat traders.
In return he promised the slaves and serfs the wives and the
property of the serf-owners. To all his followers he pledged
honors, riches and the status of boyars.³

[152] Search for security in a system of protection-dependence rela-
tionships manifested itself in a need for pretenders. If only a
rumor started about the appearance of a pretender, whole
provinces would rise to greet him. Sometimes a pretender had to
be subsequently found to lead these masses of discontents who
rose to follow a fancied liberator and benefactor. Such conditions
only contributed to the prolongation of the troubled times and
prevented an early establishment and consolidation of a new
authority. It was in such a way that most of the seventeenth
century became a century of riotings and rebellions which
climaxed in the great rising under Stanka Razin in 1670-1671.
Originating among the Don Cossacks, this movement soon spread
to the Volga regions and developed into a general war of the
lower strata against the upper classes. In this, as in the other
uprisings of that century, many excesses were committed by both
the rebels and the government forces. The same features of
social struggle were repeated in the eighteenth century, in the
great peasant rebellion that was led by Pugachev, another Cos-
sack chieftain.

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669 Also the nineteenth century witnessed a number of peasant
rebellions. In the beginning of that century the peasants of the

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nology opponents are referred to as the "enemies of the people." They are said to be "groups of spies," "traitors to the country," "dregs of humanity," "fiendish criminals," "pigmies," "useless rubbish," "hordes of barbarians," "hangmen," "cannibals," "enemies of humankind."¹⁸ These "instruments of oppression of the proletariat," full of "falsehoods and perverse lies," "narrow-minded petty-bourgeois with sickly mentality," have to be mercilessly "smashed," "annihilated," "crushed," "destroyed" with an "ever greater frenzy and ferocity."¹⁹ They have to be "cleansed" from the Soviet society in order to ensure the consolidation of the rule of the Bolsheviks.

It was in order to justify ruthlessness in dealing with the opposition that labelling, denouncing and name-calling has become prominent in Bolshevik practices. Any softness toward the "enemies" is denounced as bourgeois "sentimentalism."²⁰ Instead, *besposhchadnost* (mercilessness), *surovost* (ruthlessness), *besstrashie* (fearlessness), and *zheleznaya volia* (iron will) are said to be the "Lenin ways" by which the political workers are to deal with all the "opponents, slackers, and deviants."

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If in this "life and death fight," ruthlessness, pitilessness, and mercilessness have to be applied then also cunning, guile, craft, ruse and deceit are equally welcome as useful means. Lenin is often quoted as saying that the Communists, when necessary, must "resort to strategy and adroitness, illegal proceedings, reticence and subterfuge,"²¹ that they must use any trick and veiling of truth; that they must dodge and maneuver. They must be ready in the interest of final success to suffer humiliation and self-abasement. In the interest of the cause and of final victory, they must know how to retreat and how to "crawl in the mud on their bellies."²² According to the Bolshevik teaching, there is not an "absolute ethic." Every act is measured by how it corresponds to the interests of the group.²³

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Emphasis on extreme hatred, on ruse, and on mercilessness against those who do not conform is not new in the history of Russian society. Destructive aggression formed an aspect of the Czarist rule; it was manifested in the persecution of religious

DESTRUCTIVE AGGRESSION

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dissenters, in the civil wars as well as in the struggle between the Czarist police and the revolutionary intelligentsia; it was even formulated as an ideology and became a credo of Anarchism. 152 661 175

In the Bolshevik ideology this anti-humanism is justified by representing the "enemies" as not being human beings. Just as in the folk attitudes toward enemy aliens, the oppositionists and the adversaries, actual and potential, real and imaginary, are identified in Bolshevik writings with "gnats," "insects," "reptiles," "dogs," "wild beasts," and "beasts of prey." It is by such ways of reasoning that the Soviet pedagogists have come to the assertion that indoctrination of the people with "burning hatred" of the enemy does not contradict the ideas of humanism, because, they claim, the ideas of humanism and humane feelings do not apply to beasts. In this manner even acts of cruelty toward the "enemies" are condoned and encouraged. 152 661 829

Hatred of the enemies of the socialist Motherland by no means contradicts the principles of humanism, since it is devoted to the protection of the rights and liberty of the worker from the designs of beasts of prey.²⁴

The need for such an appeal to extreme animosities against the adversaries is in itself an indication of instability of the Bolshevik system. The ruling faction had to resort to such a means in order to promote complete identification with and fanatical devotion to the Cause and to the Leader. Here, however, we see a noticeable difference between the Czardom and the Soviet Russia. Though the Czarist system often exhibited aspects of extreme ruthlessness, the whole ideological and intellectual development of the Czarist Russia, especially in the last century of its existence, was in the direction of increasing Westernization and humanization. This trend coincided with certain gains in the field of personal, economic, and cultural freedoms in the Czardom. 152 661 [178] [64]

As a result terrorism and acts of violence, though widely practiced, were not openly advocated as official Czarist policy. Many moderate and conservative factions of the intelligentsia strongly denounced all acts of terror performed either by the government or under the auspices of the revolutionary intelligentsia. One 517 661 000